

Board backs nurses in grievance

Changing shifts should have involved union

By **MELISSA LAFLAMME**
Staff Writer

A decision by the Sullivan County Nursing Home to end weekend shifts for employees created a rift between workers and management, a union official said.

Unity But both sides say they hope the damaged relationships can be healed.

"When you change someone's schedule you really impact their lives," said Bryan Lamirande, a staff representative for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which represents nursing home employees. "Changes should have been implemented cooperatively with the union."

By eliminating the "Baylor shifts" without consulting the union, relationships deteriorated, he said.

Under the "Baylor shifts," which the county implemented in 2005, employees worked 12-hour shifts on Saturday and Sunday, but were paid for 36 hours.

The shifts were eliminated after the nursing home noticed a rise in employee absenteeism. Employee absenteeism resulted in resident complaints about the quality of care, said Sullivan County Manager Ed Gil De Rubio.

Nurses were not showing up for their scheduled shifts, Gil De Rubio said. Residents were complaining that they weren't getting the service they deserved, he added.

The union was upset that the decision to end the weekend shifts late last year was made unilaterally without negotiating the impact with the union, so it filed a grievance in January with the state Public Employee Labor Relations Board. After discussions between the union, manage-

See **NURSES** - Page A7

EAGLE TIMES

SUNDAY
APRIL 15, 2007

SUNDAY
APRIL 15, 2007

NURSES FROM PAGE A1

ment and the state board, the county agreed that it should have negotiated the impact with the union. The state board found in favor of the union last month. It ordered the county to provide back pay to one employee and the post the ruling at the nursing home for 30 days. It did not order the Baylor shifts to be reinstituted.

Some employees who were displaced from the Baylor shifts were rescheduled to eight-hour shifts that spanned throughout the regular work week. Others with scheduling conflicts were forced to seek employment elsewhere, union officials said.

While Lamirande still feels that the failure to bargain with the union over the change has

resulted in a decline in employee morale, he remains hopeful administration and the union will work together cooperatively rather than destructively.

"Our relationship is now damaged. We need to find a way to respect one another."

Bryan Lamirande

Representative for American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

"Our relationship is now damaged," he said. "We need to find a way to respect one another," he said, noting disagreements between the union and management on current negotiations. "It is important in the long run to establish a professional relationship."

Gil DeRubio, who calls the relationship professional, says the Baylor shifts were not a big issue.

"Everyone knew the Baylor issue was going to be a pilot program," he said. "The bigger issue is health care."